



MARIST YOUTH MINISTRY: A WAY TO JOURNEY TOGETHER AS A GLOBAL FAMILY

MESSAGE FROM MARIST INTERNATIONAL
MISSION COMMISSION





We believe that it is worthwhile to offer the joy and light of the Gospel to all young people in the world, whatever their conditions and realities. We reaffirm this important belief regardless of the various cultural, economic, and social contexts where young people are to be found.

We are aware that young people today, in many geographical areas of the world, are not as interested in church and religion as they used to be. Many of them, having grown up in Christian families, are drifting away. During the last decade, those who have stopped attending church are growing in number. This reveals a wider sociological and cultural trend of drifting away. When asked at different meetings and gatherings what has helped their faith to grow, “church” does not even figure among the first factors.

Young people are trying to be faithful in a rapidly changing, post-Christian culture, where institutions such as the Church, which acts as reference points for life, are being rethought. In the document, ***Evangelisers in the Midst of Youth***, it is rightly pointed out that *“today it is not uncommon to hear people claim that we are not only living in a changing time but are witnessing an earthshaking time of change. We are talking about a profound transformation in our way of seeing, feeling, relating to, and loving, all of which can be observed to an even greater degree*

*in the young*¹. The availability and avalanche of information and competing worldviews, as well as a greater resistance to the teaching of faith, in some places or among their peers, make it more difficult for young people to make sense of a complex culture.

But the good news is that as Marists of Champagnat, we have a history from our foundation that guides us to look for ways of staying connected to the young people even in their unexplored aspects of life.

What is Marist Youth Ministry (MYM)?

Marist Youth Ministry (MYM) is an integrated and coordinated area of ministry that includes young people in school and young adults beyond the school² years. Like St. Marcellin Champagnat, founder of the Marist Brothers, MYM is dedicated to “making Jesus Christ known and loved.” MYM aims to reach out to young people in schools, in social work and in other areas of solidarity. In fact, we seek to reach out to young people wherever they are to dialogue with their reality. MYM is committed to involve and accompany young people, whether they are students, young adults or graduates of Marist and non-Marist ...and to assist them in embracing their personal and community life projects.

As a vital part of a community of faith, MYM invites young people to grow in their Marist and Christian identity through an authentic encounter with Jesus Christ. Accompanied by MYM agents and educators and supported by their own personal and shared journey of life and faith, MYM encourages them to discover their call to life. In addition, in places where we live with non-Christian young people, MYM helps them to meet and grow in a human-centered (humanistic) way.

Through experiences of prayer, reflection, community, and service, MYM awakens young people to their God-given gifts and talents, enabling them to become agents of change in the world, especially among their peers.

The priority of MYM

Since children and young people are the most underserved population in the world today around religious education and catechesis as well as topics in integral formation for life, it comes as no surprise that youth ministry is a priority for the Institute. Our Constitutions tell us, “*We contemplate the world through the eyes of the poor children and young people. We keep ourselves*

¹ *Evangelizers in the Midst of Youth*, article 4, p.16 English version.

² Definition adapted from Marist Youth Australia: <https://maristyouthministry.com>





*alert and are ready to go to new fields of mission close to the most vulnerable among them” (Article 60).³ As Marcellin’s followers, we need the courage to journey to places on the margins, where the light of the Gospel is having a difficult time in breaking through. Throughout the Institute, efforts are being made to get in touch with alienated young people and the numerous problems they are facing. The XXII General Chapter put it succinctly: “**To journey with children and young people living on the margins of life, searching for Jesus, like Mary, in the caravans of life, in the tumult of our cities (Lk 2, 41-49), and in the masses of displaced people who are seeking a better future for their children.**”⁴*

Interestingly, the level of priority on youth ministry among different regions and Administrative Units today is high. And while some AUs with a booming youth population have not made youth ministry a priority, some very interested and creative youth ministers have striven hard to establish this vital form of youth ministry in those areas. In the Institute today, youth ministry coordinators with more young people and those with average population of young people are more likely to say youth ministry is one of their AUs top priorities.

³ The 2020 Constitutions and Statutes, Institute of the Marist Brothers, Art. 60. pg. 69 (EN edition)

⁴ Document of the XXII General Chapter, Rio Negro, Colombia 2017, pg. 3 of the online word copy.

The early results of the current MYM survey at the Institute level is showing the first signs of an interesting point. AUs with larger youth groups tend to be more willing to invest in these programmes, increasing staff and budgets. AUs with a smaller group of young people tend to be less willing to invest resources in Marist Youth Ministry. The question then might be: What are the current experiences of Marist Youth Ministry that help us to maintain contact with young people?

The responses to this question are clear: well-structured youth movements, with trained leaders and very active youth participation in organised programmes (such as Aventúrate, MARCHA, REMAR, other movements), youth communities (university and extracurricular), which share faith, life, apostolate, and formation in a regular and service-oriented way. It also includes provincial and interprovincial networking and coordination, which serves to share models, practices, formation, and core experiences, including regional MYM meetings.

What best practices do we find outside the marist world?

Today, more than ever, partnerships and sharing of best practices produce better results for the benefit of each AU than doing it in isolation. Many Provinces, Districts and Regions of the Institute collaborate with other like-minded institutions and activities to promote the best ways to help young people grow and develop their faith and their belonging to the people God.

Some examples can be found in different parts of the world, where pastoral experiences and options are multiplying. The Marianists and the Franciscans run youth camps for leadership training; the Jesuits have developed an approach centred on the parish apostolate and facilitate insertion experiences with university and post-university students; the Salesians have a very well-structured





youth movement, with a well-developed system of volunteering among young people. These youth groups function with the active participation of youth leaders who interact from various schools and oratories.

Another example is the Pontifical Encounter Movement for the Promotion of Youth (known as Emproistas). By choice, its members are only young people and the few adults who remain in the movement do not lead it. Through their own methodology, they make it possible for Christians to live together in common to promote groups that leaven the environment with the Gospel and help to strengthen the vocation, leadership, and personality of young people. They seek to encourage them towards an integral vocational fulfilment and to support them in their free choice of faith and leadership service in their groups and communities.

THE TYPE OF MYM WE WANT TO HAVE TODAY

It is difficult to establish a single Institute-wide Marist Youth Ministry because the diversity is great. We will have to look for those aspects of Marist Youth Ministry that “give” us unity --- unity of purpose “yes”, but uniformity “no”.

We wish for:

- **A ministry centred on the Gospel.** We believe that there is a need for a proactive and clear orientation and youth ministry that focuses on living the Gospel in the Marist way.
- **A well-articulated youth ministry.** It is important to realise that, more and more, curricula occupy young people all day long, so that time is very restricted for other activities. We need to articulate and integrate MYM with the curriculum of the schools or social centres, universities, or

other educational activities. We know that there is a long way to go, but in general, MYM is still something extra within the curricula of our institutions. Perhaps, it is good to think of it having a more central place and strengthened in the whole organisation of our educational institutions.

- **An welcoming ministry.** In addition to the above, we need to have a youth ministry that welcomes everyone, that leaves no one out, that engages in dialogue, that is open, that is inspired by a sense of uniqueness, loyalty, and diversity. Youth ministry needs to look at and treat with respect the new ideologies, expressions and realities of young people and evangelise with a correct conscience and charity.

- **An integral pastoral care.** In this regard, MYM makes a methodological choice to have an integrated approach. This means strengthening interiority, giving priority to being rather than doing, and offering a view from a Christian anthropological perspective. It also means learning to connect content and proposals of different kinds, such as care for the common home and solidarity.

- **A pastoral care for life.** MYM promotes, from the concrete realities of youth, some itineraries... to approach the perspectives on life and the meaning of existence.

- **A pastoral care for change.** There are young people with concerns about life and the world, who are looking for spaces to dialogue, to journey with others, to live an experience of community that breaks through technological isolation and the culture of consumerism. There are young people who want to work together to change their immediate commu-





nity, their society. They are young people who have common causes to defend globally. This ministry reflects and acts on respect for the environment, non-discrimination of people, the pastoral care of immigration and the richness of intercultural coexistence. Marist Youth Ministry today must focus on giving young people the opportunity for solidarity action, as well as social and faith journeys.

- **A contemporary youth ministry.** Finally, we need a youth ministry with a contemporary language and content, suitable for different age groups. In response to the requests of young people (XXII General Chapter, 2017), MYM engages in the debates of this time and deepens aspects of human rights, equality, inclusion, openness to the global, spirituality and other areas of value for the development of young people.

We respond with creativity

Commitment to MYM requires all youth leaders to develop creative ways of responding to the yearnings and aspirations of today's young people. We are called to **“be bridge builders”, and to be close to them, “especially the marginalised”**.⁵

As a result, we are actively working to:

⁵ From the Document of the XXII General Chapter (Let's Walk as a Global Family), Rio Negro, Colombia, 2017

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- **Offer “meaningful” programmes.** A creative response from youth ministry, as an Institute, encourages us to design projects and programmes that contribute to the meaning of young people’s lives.
 - **Train Christian humanism (human-centered).** Our creative response must address the formation of Christian humanism, which will serve to restore the wholeness, richness, and value of the dignity of young people.
 - **Empower.** One creative response is to “empower” the young people we encounter. This empowerment fosters leadership skills and could help them build their lives both now and in the future. Young people could be agents of cultural, social, and religious transformation, and protagonists in their own history.
 - **Promote the Christian vocation.** Young people discover in the Gospel a source of life and develop their vocation within the Church and society.
 - **Help others to grow in leadership.** We must encourage young people to grow in leadership from an ethical perspective, whether in society or in the Church.
 - **Be a significant presence.** As Marists, MYM is called to be a meaningful presence, promoting the vocation of brothers and laity together in mission. This is a quality presence that provides young people with models of life and commitment to society and the Church.



Helping young people to make a difference in the world

In line with the XXII General Chapter, we dream about which experiences, area...areas or fundamental elements of MYM can be an impulse for listening, transformation, empowerment and accompaniment of young people, helping them to make a difference in the world and in the Church. We propose to:

- 1. Promote experiences of solidarity “with meaning”.** MYM offers young people experiences of solidarity that connect social action with spirituality and the meaning of life. From a transcendent point of view, this helps them to get closer to their own life and reality.
- 2. Re-imagine accompaniment.** Young people should have the opportunity for personal accompaniment and to cultivate the habit of sharing with others their longings, desires, and growth in life. Accompaniment processes need to be reimagined in both their forms and languages. This requires a significant presence among young people, time for listening and time for accompaniment. It is a pastoral decision to give priority to the personalisation of faith and individual processes.
- 3. Take care of the community dimension in MYM.** Marist and Christian history are full of “milestones” that we must keep alive and pass on. We constantly help young people to experience the meaning of the TABLE of La Valla, which invites us to meet in community and to put our services to the care of others, in the way of Mary.

Synergies between mym and the other mission areas

Recently, Pope Francis called all those involved in the education of young people to a **Global Compact for Education**. He drew on the African saying that “it takes a whole community to educate a child”. For the Marist Institute, this is an important call. No single action or area can address the globality of young people’s needs. There is a need for greater collaboration among all of us to achieve better integrated education and evangelisation.

To strengthen the evangelisation of young people today, we make synergies that help us to have a greater effect in:

- 1. Understanding that MYM should not be exclusive.** Young people belong to society and to the Church. Therefore, the *collaboration of all*, including parents, government, church, and schools, is necessary in responding to their needs and hopes.
- 2. Integrating diverse experiences.** The wealth of Marist life experiences

offered today, for both brothers and lay people, is very broad. It is good to explore options adapted to young people and to offer diverse *experiences of Marist life*. The value of these is multiplied when we connect the questions being asked by today's generations with an intergenerational and intercultural dialogue. They are pathways to satisfy the thirst for meaning, transcendence, spirituality, and vocational response in the lives of young people.

3. Fostering the culture of encounter. The possibilities that develop around solidarity and volunteering increase the options for the Christian experience to foster *fraternity, the culture of encounter and social friendship*. These are doors that can transform the desires of young people into real, vital, and vocational changes. Collaboration between Regions, Provinces, Marist NGOs, and volunteers can help this purpose.

4. Articulating school ministry, Marist Networks and MYM. Given that MYM relates in many locations to school ministry, the new Marist Global Network Schools can be a good forum for *engaging young people from around the Marist world* in a life and faith experience in a global exchange. All this while continuing to build bridges between the future Marist Youth Ministry Network, the Network of Marist Institutions of Higher Education, the Marist Volunteers Network and the Marist Solidarity and Children's Rights Network.



A call to action

All Marists of Champagnat feel connected and passionate about the present and future possibilities of MYM. We are an Institute which is developing many strategies for growth, for a shared journey as a global family. To continue the dialogue and action plans, all Marist Youth Ministry agents are invited to:

1. Promote MYM platforms, especially in the neediest AUs.
2. Encourage networking among MYM around the world.
3. Share best practices and synergies between the AUs and the Regions, offering experiences to young people.
4. Promote MYM networking.
5. Work with *Youth Research Centres* (Observatories) to continuously analyse the youth world, cultural changes, and new generational values, and finally,
6. Create and accompany MYM experiences in response to the calls of the XXII General Chapter, to encourage listening, transformation, empowerment, and accompaniment of young people.

May Jesus, companion of the disciples of Emmaus, help us to be a significant presence among young people all over the world.

On behalf of the International Marist Mission Commission
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If you wish to share your ideas, reflections or experiences with the Commission as a result of these messages, you can write to the email fms.cimm@fms.it

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